

January 21, 2015

Working while studying in the United States

Q: *I'm a university student on an F-1 visa and I'm interested in working while studying. I'm also thinking about trying to find a job that would allow me to stay in the U.S. after I complete my degree. Am I allowed to get a job while I am in the U.S. studying, or maybe after my studies?*

A: Let's start with the first part of your question – YES, in most instances, you can work while you attend university.

There are rules governing your employment, and the first is that you must continue to get decent grades in your classes. You may work only part-time – up to 20 hours per week during the semester. And in your first year of study, you may work only on your school's campus, in a position that does not displace a U.S. resident from a job. You should contact your college or university in order to learn about the specific on-campus employment opportunities that may be available for you.

During breaks between academic terms, you may work full-time, as long as you intend to register for classes being offered during the next term. Many international students choose to work in libraries, bookstores, cafeterias, gyms and other establishments at their colleges and universities.

After that first year, you may apply to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for authorization to work in a business that is not directly affiliated with your university. An official from your school (typically called a Designated School Official, or DSO) must assist you in this process by certifying that you are in good academic standing at your school, so you will need to work closely with your school's officials in order to complete and submit the correct documentation to USCIS. If you receive authorization from USCIS, you may accept a job off campus. You will still be limited to a maximum of 20 hours of work per week while school is in session.

Now, what are your opportunities after you complete your studies?

After your academic program concludes, you may continue to work on or off campus for up to one year, in a position that's related to your field, through a program called Optional Practical Training. You will need authorization to do this, but your school's officials will work with you to acquire that. For more permanent work, you would need to qualify for a different visa status, usually H1B. We'll save that for a different column.

These same guidelines govern employment for holders of M-1 visas (vocational study) after studies are completed.

Good luck with your studies! For more information on student employment, visit <http://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/students-and-exchange-visitors/students-and-employment>.

You can find more information about how to travel to the U.S. on our website, www.kingston.usembassy.gov and the website of our authorized service provider at <https://ais.usvisa-info.com/en-jm/niv>. Keep on top of Embassy news on our Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/US-Embassy-Jamaica> and by following @USEmbassyJA on Twitter. We also answer general visa questions on our Facebook and Twitter pages.